



### *Inside Gambling Reform*

Friend,

With all that is going on in the world it is easy to let moments pass us by - I want to make sure we don't do that.

So much is happening in gambling reform right now it's almost hard to keep up. Just this week we've had [Crown Casino actually admit they had facilitated money laundering](#) in their Melbourne casino. Astonishing stuff. These revelations, and many more, have been coming out thanks to the [Bergin Inquiry in NSW](#). It was hard not to feel some schadenfreude when Crown was told yesterday that they were not allowed to open their \$2billion+ Barangaroo casino in Sydney to gambling. I've been doing interviews on that today, as you may have heard. It does beg the question: [Why has shining a light on Crown's murky world taken so long?](#)

This week also saw the [Western Bulldogs formally getting out of pokies](#). This is a huge win, and a special mention must go to Champ Stuart McDonald for his part in making this happen through [running for the Bulldogs' board](#) to draw attention to the hypocrisy that was a wonderful family club being associated with awful gambling harm.

Since our last newsletter, the NSW Government has also introduced [self-exclusion legislation](#), a big shift in the most gambling-captured state in Australia. We explore the details more below, but I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made the time to contact their local MPs to offer their support for change, and especially those who have made their own submissions. We've even had [support from Christian faith groups in NSW](#) for this, writing an open letter to back the reforms and asking for them to go further.

Last week saw the blasted pokies turned back on in Victoria after an amazingly long break. What a relief people felt during that time; it truly was a COVID silver lining with stress and anxiety eased for thousands, and \$1.8 billion saved from going through those machines of addiction. More on this below. And let's not forget the farce that was suggestions of horse owners and other connections to be [allowed to attend the Cox Plate](#) before the Victorian COVID lockdown eased. The backflip was quick after understandable community outrage, but the fact this was even considered tells us all we need to know about how [powerful the gambling lobby is](#).

October saw us mark Gambling Harm Awareness Week in Victoria and NSW in the same week for the first time. Lived experience Champions and staff were both extremely busy during the week, appearing online in meetings and forums, and doing media interviews. Thanks to everyone who put so much personal energy into this. A particular highlight was the first ever virtual CroakeyGO, highlighting #GamblingHarms as a public health issue. The Alliance sponsored this online event, which was brilliantly hosted by our very own Anna Bardsley. Academic speakers and Champs explored and shared their experiences on the connections between gambling harm, mental ill-health and family violence. It was an incredibly powerful two hours, with fantastic questions and conversations, The event resulted in well over one million Twitter impressions, and this [article](#) -- I highly recommend a read.

As always, we thank you for your ongoing support and energy in the fight for gambling reform!

Stay safe and well,

*Rev Tim Costello*

Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform

### **SBS dragging the chain on gambling ads**

Our [campaign](#) to stop the rampant exploitation of Australian families through relentless exposure to gambling ads continues. Partnering with our friends at Save Our SBS, we have secured more than [10,000 petition signatures](#) and sent more than 1,000 emails to the SBS Chair and Communications Minister calling on our public broadcaster to do better.

We now know that during COVID, wagering companies spent more money on advertising and incentives to gamble, and it worked -- the amount gambled online [significantly increased](#), [particularly among young men](#), and [foreign bookmakers](#) were one of the few industries to report a tidy profit. We have seen shocking new tactics deployed by the industry, including using snapchat filters during the Spring Racing Carnival and AFL Grand Final to promote and normalise harmful messages to young people.

### **Lockdown ends in Victoria**



Lockdown lasted 238 days in Victoria, and while it's certainly been tough, for many it's also been a [period of significant relief](#). For the first time in nearly three decades, 27,000 poker machines were switched off across Victoria with a collective saving of \$1.8 billion from being taken out of the community via pokies losses.

Unfortunately, poker machines reopened in Victoria last Monday. While we're disappointed governments did not [heed our call](#) to use this moment to rethink and reset the role of gambling in our communities and permanently reduce machine operating hours, we did see some temporary harm reduction measures introduced, including venue operating limits of 16 hours per day.

Victoria was the only state to introduce such protective measures and this will undoubtedly stem the tidal wave of harm [seen in other states](#).

As the year draws to a close, we're focused on building upon these measures to achieve long term, sustainable outcomes for the entire community.

### **Reform opportunities heat up in NSW**

In NSW, if a person self-excludes from a gambling pub or club, [currently the venue isn't obliged to honour that deed](#) and [keep them out](#). Similarly, venues turn a deaf ear to pleas from concerned family members, who want to keep a loved one safe. After a long wait, the consultation draft for amendments to fix these problems was [released on 25 September](#).

Through discussing these improvements, the Minister went so far as to point out that NSW is the most harmed state, and took us by surprise [by floating the idea of a cashless gambling scheme](#) as well.

We're aiming for 100 [submissions](#) by allied organisations on the legislation by 11 December, and we'll be [building a campaign](#) with our supporters to ensure that the reforms are passed in Parliament.

## Victorian Councils undertake landmark election

Victoria had its local government elections this October. The Alliance for Gambling Reform conducted a campaign to create awareness in candidates about what they can do to help advocate for gambling reform, and minimise harm in their communities.

We had 600 candidates respond to our survey where:

- 96% of candidates believed that opening hours should be reduced in venues
- 91% supported gambling ads being banned
- 99% committed to reducing gambling harm in their council area.

Our campaign also spread information to voters about which of their candidates cared about gambling harm in their area. We look forward to working with Victorian councils to reduce gambling harm in their municipalities, and we will be launching our councils advocacy policy over the next few months.

## Champions for Change

We simply could not seek gambling reform without the people who are so generous in sharing their lived experience of gambling harm to advocate for change. This happens around the country and in recent months has included letters to SBS about removing gambling ads, contact with politicians, submissions to local councils during Victoria's recent election and [many media appearances](#).

We thank the Champs who were especially active during Gambling Harm Awareness Week. Personal stories and research being matched in the [CroakeyGo](#) event and at a [webinar](#) hosted by Monash University were important and definitely had an impact on participants.

Members from four states have been meeting on Thursday nights for training and to discuss reform including the proposed legislation in NSW and the impact of opening up across Australia after the lockdowns due to COVID-19. If you want to know more about this drop [Sara](#) a line.

The updated [Stories for Change](#) page on the Alliance website features tales from people who have experienced gambling harm. These are a powerful vehicle for influencing social change, including for use in submissions to all levels of government. If you would like to share your story, [please let us know](#).

In Solidarity,

Rebecca Thorpe

Communications Director

Alliance for Gambling Reform